

# Department of Human Services

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## Articles in Today's Clips Friday, March 14, 2008

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# Authorities use technology to root out bridge card fraud

Posted by [WHITNEY LLOYD | Capital News Service](#)

March 14, 2008 10:13AM

LANSING - Times may change, but the crime is as old as the program itself.

Since food stamps were introduced in the 1950s to help poor families pay for life's necessities, fraud has occurred.

Some merchants and benefit recipients have found ways to exploit the system which is designed to help the needy buy groceries and prevent them from buying alcohol and tobacco.

Today, authorities say it's easier than ever for any of the 600,835 Michigan stores in the program and the state's 1.25 million beneficiaries to make a quick buck, thanks to electronic food stamps which were introduced eight years and are known as Bridge cards.

But it's also easier for authorities to catch fraud, thanks to the electronic "paper trail," said Al Kimichik, director of the Office of Inspector General in the Department of Human Services (DHS).

Nationally, it's estimated that as many as 3 percent of Bridge cards are misused when retailers give cardholders cash instead of groceries - fraud that costs Michigan \$25 million annually, Kimichik said.

Cardholders often use that cash elsewhere to buy the booze, tobacco and drugs they can't buy with their Bridge card.

There are no restrictions to exclude people with drug and alcohol problems from qualifying for Bridge cards, Kimichik said.

The merchant can swipe the card on a scanner, creating a record of fake food stamp purchases, then collect the money for those purchases from DHS, which administers the program with money for the U.S. Agriculture Department, Kimichik said.

"Coupon-form paper food stamps were bought and sold on the street corner, whereas these electronic debit cards are bought and sold in stores and we have a better way of monitoring and tracking that activity," Kimichick said.

DHS has partnered with the federal government and the State Police's two-person Bridge Card Task Force, which uses undercover officers, surveillance, informants and forensic accounting to track down guilty retailers, said Detective First Lt. Marty Bugbee, commander of the criminal investigations unit in Detroit.

For example, in February, the task force used 220 officers to bust nine stores in Detroit and Dearborn Heights, rounding up 25 suspects and recovering a preliminary \$1 million in lost revenue, Bugbee said.

Another Detroit store recently busted is suspected of \$100,000 in Bridge card fraud and faces federal charges, Bugbee said.

These stores are typical of most caught in ongoing investigations - primarily gas stations and neighborhood stores in Wayne County, he said.

"You'll look at the records of these stores and see that they have \$100,000 worth of Bridge card transactions, and you'll go in and they'll just have a chip rack, a couple of pieces of beef jerky and a cooler full of pop, and you know something is up," he said. "You'll search the place and a drawer full of Bridge cards will turn up."

Bigger groceries, like Meijer and Kroger, are less likely to engage in fraud because their check-out technology labels each purchase as Bridge-card authorized or not, and the card can be used only to purchase the authorized items, Bugbee said.

Continuing investigations into suspected stores often reveal that the merchant is involved in alcohol, tobacco and returnable-bottle smuggling as well, Bugbee said.

It's estimated that the state loses \$172 million annually from such frauds which are prosecuted by Attorney Gen. Mike Cox as organized crimes.

Under such prosecutions, the state can recover its money from merchants' personal bank accounts, certificates of deposit, money market accounts and mutual funds, Bugbee said.

After a store is criminally charged, DHS decides whether to allow it to remain a Bridge card participant.

Beneficiaries found guilty of selling Bridge cards may be disqualified from the program and have to repay the benefits they sold. If they're convicted of selling more than \$500 in benefits, they could be permanently disqualified, said Maureen Sorbet of DHS.

Kimichik said, "There's a complicity in this. Both sides think they are coming away with something. The cardholder walks away with cash, the stores have bought the benefits at a discount, but the state will ultimately pay them the full price.

MIRS

March 13, 2008

## Senate Passes First-In-Nation Food Stamp Change

A bipartisan bill increasing food stamp payments to twice a month that passed the Senate today prompted a sharp reaction from Sen. Nancy **CASSIS** (R-**Novi**). Michigan would become the nation's first state to implement the change. Supporters said it would encourage recipients to eat fresh foods, help the agriculture industry and help stores that see a rush of business at the first of the month and then a steep drop-off. But Cassis charged that **SB 0120**, sponsored by Sen. Martha G. **SCOTT** (D-Highland Park), could cost \$1 billion to implement and said Democrats hadn't said how they'd pay for it. "A couple weeks ago, my friends on the other side of the aisle said we have to pay as we go," Cassis said.

Sen. Mark **JANSEN** (R-Grand Rapids) corrected Cassis, saying "the \$1 million price tag was estimated a couple months ago." He said the Senate would revisit the matter if the cost rose.

Scott said she didn't "know where Cassis got her figures from." Scott fired back that Cassis is "constantly giving tax breaks to businesses" but she didn't want to help those in need. Sen. Mickey **SWITALSKI** (D-Roseville) said the \$600,000 price tag was subject to 50 percent reimbursement from the federal government. The Department of Human Services (DHS) could absorb the rest in its appropriation, he said.

The bill passed **SB 0120**, 35-2, with Cassis and Sen. Bruce **PATTERSON** (R-Canton) dissenting.

There are about 550,000 food stamp cases with roughly 1.2 million recipients in Michigan. The food stamp program is primarily federally funded; with DHS contributing 50 percent of administration costs.

# Stretching out the monthly budget: food stamps

By ALEX DOTY  
Sentinel-Standard writer

March 14, 2008

IONIA - Food stamp recipients and area grocers could benefit from a proposal that would change the way food stamps are distributed to area residents.

The legislation, which passed the Senate, would amend the Social Welfare Act, requiring the Michigan Department of Human Services to issue food stamp benefits twice per month instead of at the beginning.

“By dividing it into two parts, it will allow retailers to balance out the demands on the work force and the food supplies needed in stores for food recipients,” said Maureen Sorbet, DHS spokesperson.

She said the plan would also allow clients to purchase fresh food over the course of the month instead of all at once.

By splitting this funding up over two dates, it will have an impact in Ionia County.

“We have a good number of people on food stamps,” Ionia County DHS representative Shirley Pyle said.

In February, Pyle said there were 3,191 food stamp cases in Ionia County. This results in roughly 9,573 people affected.

Currently, food stamp recipients have their benefits put on a debit card during the first nine days of the month, depending on their case number.

Pyle said quite a few food stamp recipients purchase monthly groceries,

early in the month.

The change would also have an impact on local supermarkets providing food to people in the food stamp program.

Chrisanne Lundstrom, general manager at Fred's Food Center in Ionia, said roughly 50 percent of their customers use food stamps, and the proposed plan would help them better plan their stock of supplies during the course of the month.

Additionally, she said it would have an impact on the store's bottle return, as many people use the return toward the end of the month to supplement their food stamps.

The legislation is currently moving on to the House for approval.

The DHS has also sent a survey to food stamp recipients on the proposal, and they will send results to the legislature in April.

Additionally, the DHS will also need approval from the federal government before instituting a change, as Michigan will be the first state to implement such a change.



## Food stamp frequency in Michigan

Friday, March 14, 2008

Making ends meet these days is tough, particularly if you're living on food stamps. Legislation that would issue Michigan food stamp recipients monthly payment in two installments instead of one would help people better budget that money. A family's ability to buy the fresh products that make up a healthy diet throughout the month would improve, too. However, this is no instant cure for poverty and poor food choices. Beyond when families get funds is the fundamental issue of how little they have to spend.

The federal government has not raised food stamp benefits to match inflation, despite soaring gas and food prices. Benefits average only \$1 per person per meal -- that's \$21 a week. The minimum monthly benefit has remained at \$10 since 1977.

So, as state lawmakers look at legislation that would change when payments are doled out, they should also push our congressional delegation to see that the final farm bill, which includes the Food Stamp Program, has higher payments and removes a misguided provision that prevents states from altering the payment schedule.

The Food Assistance Program targets those in the greatest need. The U.S. Department of Agricultural funds 100 percent of the program but the Department of Human Services determines eligibility. As of February, Kent County had 69,458 individuals receiving food stamps. Michigan has more than 1.2 million on food stamps -- 46 percent are children 17 and under. That number is an all-time high with the state's poor economy, decimated by the loss of auto and other manufacturing jobs.

Meanwhile, the prices of food and non-alcoholic beverages rose 4.7 percent between January and November of 2007, outpacing the 4.3 percent increase in the overall cost-of-living, according to the federal government's Consumer Price Index.

Michigan food stamp recipients get an average \$99.66 per month, according to DHS. Funds are posted to a debit card during the first 10 days of the month. Sen. Martha Scott, D-Highland Park, introduced the bill, co-sponsored by Kent County Republican Sens. Bill Hardiman, R-Kentwood, and Mark Jansen, R-Gaines Township, that passed 35 to 2 Wednesday. Under the legislation, those eligible for food assistance benefits of \$100 per month or more, would be issued payment twice each month. For example, a family of four, who gets \$350 a month, would receive two payments of \$175.

The bill was referred to the House Families and Human Services Committee. Proponents say recipients often spend all their cash at the first of the month and lack funds later to buy fresh food or milk. The bill should also benefit retailers who experience first-of-the-month surges then a decline that creates staffing and inventory issues.

DHS is surveying families about the change which would

cost the agency about \$600,000. The federal government would pay half, provided it approved the switch. No other state currently splits payments. Keeping people fed is a strong argument for building in the flexibility.

But the conversation can't end there for lawmakers; increasing benefits is vital. There is only so far a family can stretch a dollar.

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# THE DAILY Reporter

Print this story

## Envelopes to be filled to fight hunger

Print Page

By Trinity Bird-Staff Writer

COLDWATER — With the need for food in Branch County growing, the Food Bank of South Central Michigan (FBSCM) is doing what they can to keep supplying food to local agencies.

According to Holly Cavinder of the FBSCM, the annual Easter fundraiser campaign is undergoing a change this year. In years past, a grocery bag has been inserted into local newspapers that people could fill with groceries and return to local Felpausch stores. With the grocery store under new management, that will change this year. In Easter weekend publications of The Daily Reporter in Coldwater and the Hillsdale Daily News, an envelope will be inserted where donors can write checks to the FBSCM and drop them in the mail.

The donations will allow the FBSCM to continue to distribute food to agencies in Branch County. Currently the FBSCM supplies food and grocery items to 25 local agencies including agencies in Bronson, Coldwater, Quincy, Union City, Sherwood and Burlington.

Over the last five years, the FBSCM has provided 1,456,148 pounds of food in Branch County, translating into \$2,184,222 worth of food.

According to a release from the FBSCM:

n 39 percent of the individuals served by the Food Bank are children.

n 72 percent of households served by the FBSCM have incomes at or below the poverty line.

n There are over 5,000 individuals in Branch County who participate in the food stamp program. This is 10.8 percent of the county population. The average allotment per month is \$78.33.

n According to the Food Bank Council of Michigan's Blueprint to End Hunger study (conducted in Branch County in 2006), the average food stamp participant skipped 6.5 meals per week because there was not enough food to go around.

n 43 percent of adults surveyed said they had to choose between buying food and paying utilities/heating fuel.

n Demand is up. The FBSCM provided 16 percent more food in 2007.

In addition to the Easter campaign, the FBSCM benefits from the annual Feinstein Challenge. According to Cavinder, during the months of March and April, donations made to the Food Bank, designated to member agencies are "bolstered by a proportional match from philanthropist Allen Shaw Feinstein."

FBSCM serves a 275-member hunger-relief network, helping area families in Barry, Branch, Calhoun, Hillsdale, Jackson, Kalamazoo, Lenawee and St. Joseph counties. The Food Bank is a member of America's Second Harvest — The Nation's Food Bank Network and the Food Bank Council of Michigan. The Food Bank is also a United Way program delivery partner.

In Branch County, the FBSCM serves Altrusa Teen SHARE, Branch County Commission on Aging, Branch County Elder Pacts, Branch County Area Food Pantry, Branch County Health

Department, Branch County MSU Extension, Burlington SDA, Coldwater Christian Services, Bronson Area Youth Program, Bronson Community Food Pantry, CAASCM Coldwater, Calvary Baptist Church in Quincy, Coldwater Health Department, Community Unlimited in Union City, Crossroads Bible Church in Sherwood, Grace Lutheran, Kinderhook Community, Salvation Army Branch County, SonShine Ministries in Quincy, Shelter House in Coldwater, The Adapt, Inc., Today's Church of God, True Vine Fellowship in Quincy, Union City Assembly of God and the Union City Food Pantry.

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Published March 14, 2008

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## Mobile food pantry to visit Faith Fellowship on Saturday

Midday update

Matthew Miller  
Lansing State Journal

A mobile food pantry sponsored by the city of Lansing and the American Red Cross Regional Food Distribution Center will distribute free food from 9 to 11 a.m. Saturday - or until the food runs out - at Faith Fellowship Baptist Church, 1001 Dakin Street in Lansing.

Families and individuals with low or limited incomes are invited to take advantage of the program.

Contact Matthew Miller at 377-1046 or [mrmiller@lsj.com](mailto:mrmiller@lsj.com).

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## Business is brisk at free tax service

Friday, March 14, 2008

**MARY L. LAWRENCE**

**THE SAGINAW NEWS**

Nearly 90, Maurice E. Cotter helps prepare taxes for people half his age.

A former controller for The Saginaw News, Cotter is a longtime volunteer tax preparer for the United Way of Saginaw County's free Volunteer Income Tax Assistance, or VITA. United Way and Community Action Committee workers prepare tax returns at no cost for low- to moderate-income tax filers through the Tuesday, April 15, filing deadline.

"I've been doing this for about 10 years," said Cotter, of Saginaw Township. "It was something to do."

While other volunteers busily calculate tax returns using computers, Cotter does it the old-fashioned way -- by hand -- for filers who need past year returns completed. Tax filers may file or amend federal returns from three years ago and state returns that date back four years.

Often, residents arrive at Butman-Fish Library, 1716 Hancock in Saginaw -- where Cotter completes returns two days a week -- hoping to walk out with a return that promises a refund.

"We have quite a few who don't realize they have money coming back from prior years," Cotter said. "They're pretty happy when we figure out they're entitled to more."

Robert L. Wilson Jr., 66, of Saginaw gives the tax preparation service a big thumbs up.

"I'm a satisfied customer," Wilson said as he waited at Butman-Fish Library on a recent morning. Before discovering the free tax service a few years ago, Wilson paid to have his return completed.

"Some of my friends told me about it. Before that I was paying to have them done, and they weren't always done right," he said.

"The service here is good and the people are friendly. I'll come back again next year for sure."

Volunteers have completed tax returns for 70-year-old Clara Wells of Saginaw for the past seven years.

"There's a little bit of a wait, but the line moves quickly. I used to pay a lot to have this done. They do a good job, and I usually get a refund," she said.

First-time VITA user Donald Schutt, 42, of Saginaw was hoping for a refund as he waited for his turn with a volunteer.

"A relative told me about it. I'm hoping for a refund so I can pay some bills and get my kids some clothes," he said.

Cotter is one of 42 volunteers who staff VITA sites in Saginaw County.

Many people using the free service take advantage of the Earned Income Tax Credit and other benefits that may put money in their pockets, said Ismael Ahmed, director of the Michigan Department of Human Services.

In February, the department awarded more than \$236,000 to help community organizations offer free tax assistance to low-income households. Of that amount, Saginaw's CAC received \$22,000 and the Caro Human Development Commission got \$21,734 to prepare returns.

"They can use the credit or benefit to erase debt, pay winter heating bills, put a down payment on a house or any other use," Ahmed said.

An assortment of people staff VITA's free tax service, including retirees and college students.

"All of our sites have been very busy," said Marsha L. Cooley, director of community impact and volunteer services for the United Way. "This is our second year at National City Bank in Buena Vista. When they opened for the first time this year, there were more than 50 people waiting."

The volunteers complete returns on a first-come, first-served basis.

Some of those filing returns this year through the free tax assistance also are eligible for the federal government's economic stimulus rebate.

So far this year, VITA volunteers have completed 1,329 federal returns to bring \$509,577 in earned income tax credits and \$997,670 tax refunds to county residents.

Last year in Saginaw County, 17,053 people got back nearly \$34.2 million, an average of \$2,004 apiece.

Of those, VITA volunteers helped complete 5,250 tax returns for 2,297 Saginaw County low- and moderate-income tax filers. That accounted for \$1.3 million from federal returns, \$596,810 in earned income tax credits and \$478,123 in state tax refunds to county residents.

Additionally, CAC completed tax returns for 1,100 county clients who received \$600,000 in combined tax credits to county residents. v

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## More eligible to get credit

Friday, March 14, 2008

**RICK HAGLUND**

**SAGINAW NEWS DETROIT BUREAU**

There's a bit of a silver lining for hundreds of thousands of people in the dark cloud of Michigan's economy.

Declining wages for many lower-income workers last year likely make more of them eligible for the federal earned income tax credit.

Last year, 665,000 Michigan residents received \$1.2 billion from the credit, in addition to their regular refund from the 2006 tax year, the Internal Revenue Service said.

With Michigan's economy still slumping, the IRS says there probably are even more people eligible for the credit this year -- and they may not know it.

"It may not be on taxpayers' radar screen, even though they're making less money," IRS spokesman Luis Garcia said. "The economy is hurting in Michigan, and more people may qualify for the credit this year."

Also, people who have earned income but are not required to file a tax return may qualify for the credit.

Those who already have filed tax returns but think they are eligible for the credit can amend their returns by filing Form 1040X, Garcia said. Citizens can amend their federal returns for the previous three tax years.

The IRS reports that non-English speakers, nontraditional families, the homeless and rural residents are among those who may not realize they qualify. Nationally, the IRS estimates as many as one in four taxpayers who are eligible for the credit don't claim it.

"It's an incredibly important anti-poverty tool, and it's a critical income supplement at a time low- and moderate-income families in Michigan are struggling mightily to make ends meet," said Sharon Parks, vice president for policy for the Lansing-based Michigan League for Human Services.

A new state earned-income tax credit that provides eligible filers with 10 percent of the federal credit goes into effect for this tax year. Taxpayers will have the opportunity to claim the credit on their tax returns next year.

The state credit increases to 20 percent of the federal credit in the 2009 tax year. v

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# Free tax prep service helps Saginaw County residents

Posted by [Mary L. Lawrence | The Saginaw News](#)

March 14, 2008 07:54AM

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About a month remains before the government's Tuesday, April 15, filing deadline.

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## Report: 2 deaths per day among Michigan's uninsured

3/13/2008, 11:08 a.m. ET

**The Associated Press**

WASHINGTON (AP) — A new report from a health care advocacy group estimates that nearly two people in Michigan die every day because they don't have health insurance.

Families USA estimated Thursday that about 650 people in Michigan between the ages of 25 and 64 died in 2006 because they lacked health insurance.

The report was based on an earlier study by the Institute of Medicine which estimated that uninsured adults are 25 percent more likely to die prematurely than adults with private health insurance.

More than 1.1 million people in Michigan have no health insurance.

Senator Debbie Stabenow says the report should serve as a "wake-up call" on the need for universal health care coverage in the United States.

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# Lack of health policy can kill

## Nearly 2 in state die daily, study finds

BY PATRICIA ANSTETT • FREE PRESS MEDICAL WRITER • March 14, 2008

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Not having health insurance can be deadly, a growing problem that accounts for the deaths of 650 Michiganders a year, nearly two a day, a national report released Thursday concludes.

### ADVERTISEMENT

Uninsured people "live sicker and die earlier," said Ron Pollack, executive director of Families USA, a national nonprofit consumer health organization based in Washington, during a telephone news briefing.

Premature deaths among the uninsured nationwide are twice the rates of people who are killed by homicide, Pollack said.

The number of uninsured in Michigan -- 1.1 million, including 200,000 Detroiters -- is growing as more employers drop health coverage and people find insurance premiums too costly to purchase their own coverage.

The report used mathematical methods used by two highly reputable agencies, the Institute of Medicine, a nonprofit federal agency that studied the issue in 2002, and the Urban Institute, a Washington, D.C., research organization, which updated the figures in 2006. Both reports recorded federal statistics on people who lacked insurance and estimated that 25% died prematurely.

The problem is largely unrecognized, said Sister Mary Ellen Howard, director of the Cabrini Clinic, a free clinic in Detroit that is the nation's oldest such center in the United States.

"You will never read that this person died because they are uninsured," she said. The cause of death will be listed as stroke or cancer, for example, she said. "It won't say this person didn't have screening for cancer, was diagnosed late and not treated appropriately because she was uninsured."

Sen. Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich., called the report "a wakeup call for all of us, that we have got to make a commitment to universal health care coverage and access in this country."

Contact **PATRICIA ANSTETT** at 313-222-5021 or [panstett@freepress.com](mailto:panstett@freepress.com).

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March 13, 2008

## **YOUNG ADULTS LOSE MEDICAID COVERAGE IN SENATE DCH BUDGET**

Medicaid coverage for 18- and 19-year-olds would be dropped and funds for the Healthy Michigan program would be cut by 41 percent under a \$3.082 billion Department of Community Health Budget approved Thursday by a Senate Appropriations subcommittee. Those were two items that will be among several that Democrats said they will try to get changed with amendments either before the full committee or during floor debate.

Sen. Richard Kahn (R-Saginaw), chair of the Community Health Subcommittee, noted spending under the budget is \$400 million overall above current-year appropriations, and that the reductions were targeted in areas where the Granholm administration has indicated in the past that savings could be made. Total spending, with federal funds included, would be \$12.483 billion under the bill ([SB 1094](#)).

"This puts the flag in the ground as the first chamber budget and allows us to move forward," Mr. Kahn said. He said the budget does include several increases in programs that "get to the root of providing services to the needy" and provides more flexibility in how dollars are applied to deal with health problems.

The bill reflects \$3.9 million in cuts that Senate leadership targeted for the budget following warnings from the Senate Fiscal Agency that general fund revenues for 2008-09 would fall short by some \$114.2 million from January estimates.

[Sen. John Pappageorge](#) (R-Troy) welcomed the cautious budget approach, saying a 10-year review of estimates shows that they have averaged 4 percent too high when January estimates were used to build budgets.

"Especially in this budget the worst thing we can do is promise something we cannot deliver a little more than a year from now," he said.

Sen. Deb Cherry (D-Burton), minority vice chair of the subcommittee, signaled several objections to the bill, which she opposed. The overall spending increase is welcome, but it also signals the state is getting a higher federal Medicaid match because the economy is doing so poorly, she said.

The biggest objection in the bill is elimination of Medicaid coverage for 19- and 20-year-olds, Ms. Cherry said. That would cut save \$14.5 million in general funds, \$36.4 million in total spending.

The \$10.8 million cut in the Healthy Michigan Fund, taking it back to the governor's recommendations for 2007-08, will harm state efforts in areas such as tobacco use and lung diseases, she said. And she said elimination of \$2.2 million for mental health courts and \$1 million for sexually transmitted diseases that the governor sought remove the chance to curb long-term costs in prisons and in disease treatment.

The bill does include \$200,000 to study the prevalence of mental illness in jails.

The biggest areas of increased spending, compared to the executive recommendation, are \$12.4 million general fund/\$31.3 million total to keep the nursing home variable cost rate increase at 4.9 percent and continuing a wage pass-through program in nursing homes, \$7 million general fund/\$17.6 million total for increased physician reimbursement rates under primary care Medicaid codes, \$4 million general fund/\$10.1 million total to provide a 2 percent increase in pay for mental health direct care workers, and \$1.5 million general fund/\$3.8 million total to increase the pharmaceutical dispensing fee to \$3.25 from \$2.50.

Also included is \$1 million in increased funding for local public health operations, which Mr. Kahn said helps deal with a variety of health issues but with more flexible use of dollars, and \$1.99 million general fund/\$5 million total to restore disproportional share hospital payments to nonpublic unaffiliated hospitals and some hospital systems.

The budget also rejects the governor's proposal to cut \$7.3 million from non-Medicaid community mental health programs tied to a central risk pool.

The program cuts in the proposed budget drew fire from the Michigan Health and Hospital Association, the Michigan State Medical Society, and the Michigan Osteopathic Association, which zeroed in particularly on the loss in Medicaid coverage to young adults.

"For compelling human and economic reasons, now is precisely the wrong time to cut access to care for 19- and 20-year-olds covered by the Medicaid program," the groups said. They said more cuts will continue to drive health care costs higher for businesses and families with insurance which are picking up ever increasing expenses for uncompensated care.

"Whenever state Medicaid funding is reduced, Michigan receives less in Medicaid matching funds from the federal government. Thus, cuts to Medicaid funding are a "double-edged sword" for Michigan's most vulnerable citizens," the groups said in a statement.

Mr. Kahn said he hopes some of the cuts could be restored if revenues come in higher than is now forecast.



## — THE — ANN ARBOR NEWS

### Free clinic is a 'godsend' But its needs are growing in tough economic times

Friday, March 14, 2008

#### The Livingston Community News

Donna Briggs gets sinus infections every year, and the one she had earlier this winter was typical with its congestion, sniffing and discomfort.

The difference this time was that she didn't have to just suffer through it.

Briggs, a hairdresser from Whitmore Lake, has no medical insurance, but that doesn't matter to the free nondenominational, faith-based Mission Medical Clinic. She's the kind of patient the volunteer health professionals there want to help.

"This is wonderful," Briggs said during her January visit. "Hopefully, I'll get better faster."

Mission Medical Clinic has been packed since it opened Dec. 1 in the lower-level training room of the Putnam Township Fire Hall on M-36 in Pinckney. It serves uninsured patients age 18-64 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. every Saturday. Appointments are recommended.

The clinic was founded by Mitchell and Laura Goldman, of Hamburg Township. He's an emergency room physician, and she's a family nurse practitioner and former member of the University of Michigan Survival Flight team. They said a medical mission trip to India a year ago opened their eyes to how many people here are suffering because they have no medical insurance.

"There are an estimated 11,000 uninsured adults in Livingston County alone," Mitchell Goldman said. "Unfortunately, the need is growing as people get laid off or have their medical benefits cut. These are rough times."

The popularity of the clinic was expected, but still startling, the Goldmans said.

"A lot of people have the perception that uninsured people are on the rough edge of society," Mitchell Goldman said. "That's not true. They are your friends and neighbors."

Many using the clinic work part-time jobs that don't offer benefits, the volunteers said.

"They really are the working poor," said Karen Adams, of Hamburg Township, a retired nurse and clinic volunteer. "One person was working three part-time jobs and none of them provided health insurance."

The clinic treats chronic health issues, including high blood pressure, asthma and diabetes, as well as providing urgent care for colds, flu, sore throats and minor burns, cuts and sprains.

"It's a godsend," said Mary Clickner, of Cohoctah Township, who came to the clinic in January with bronchitis. "It would be nice if there were more places like this in the county, but I'm just thankful this one is here."

Practicing and retired medical professionals, as well as community members who do administrative tasks, volunteer at the clinic. All are covered by malpractice and general liability insurance, which costs the clinic about \$22,000 a year and is the biggest drain on its donated funds, Mitchell Goldman said.

The Shalom Lutheran Church Mission Possible Group, The Mission Church, the Christian House of Prayer and businesses, including National City Bank, Lakeland Carpet, Pinckney Auto Wash, Busch's

supermarket, Everything Battery and Pinckney's Rite Aid drug store, are helping, but more donations are needed, the Goldmans said.

More doctors, dentists and midlevel practitioners, such as physicians assistants and nurse practitioners, also are needed so the clinic can serve more patients, Laura Goldman said.

"We're taking care of as many people as we possibly can with who we have," she said. "The more support we get, the more we can offer patients and stay in business. I believe this clinic will go on. I don't see how we could stop now."

Leanne Smith can be reached at [lsmith@livingstoncommunitynews.com](mailto:lsmith@livingstoncommunitynews.com) or at 810-844-2011.

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## Plan set in motion to battle teen pregnancy

Friday, March 14, 2008

By **Monetta L. Harr**

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The statistics and repercussions of teenage pregnancies in Jackson County were hard enough to hear.

And then two women, a nursing supervisor and a labor and delivery nurse, both at Foote Hospital, spoke from their hearts -- one about being a fourth-generation teen parent, the other about having a teenager who got pregnant.

"Pursuing Hope for Our Youth," a strategic plan to reverse the trend of Jackson County having the fourth-highest teen pregnancy rate in Michigan, was presented at a luncheon Thursday by Jackson County United Way.

Sixty-five percent of teen births in Michigan are paid for by taxpayers and the average annual cost associated with a child born to a mother age 17 or younger is nearly \$5,000, according to

the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative.

Nearly 75 percent of these mothers will require public assistance within five years.

"This meeting and this report is meant to engage the community in a call to action," said Nancy Miller of the Jackson Legacy Program. She served as moderator, telling an audience of about 130 that it's because she was the second born child to teen parents.

Tishia Baltimore, a nursing supervisor at Foote, said she was the second child of her 19-year-old mother. Baltimore was that age when she had her own daughter.

What she remembers about her childhood is "poverty and watching my mother struggle."

Tammy Myers, a labor and delivery nurse at Foote, choked back tears as she acknowledged her embarrassment when her daughter told Myers last year she was pregnant.

"My first patient was a 13-year-old girl, and she fueled the fire I've felt for this issue, which is so big, if we don't do something about it, we will all suffer," Myers said.

Michelle White, initiative coordinator, discussed many possibilities to reach teens, and said the United Way has pledged \$75,000 a year for three years to start programs in schools and neighborhoods. Some are simple, like getting teens involved in sports to keep them active. Others have teen mothers and fathers talk to their peers about what it's like to care for a child.

"I've been asked why we have such a problem when other counties don't. What is their magic program that prevents these pregnancies? I don't know the answer because they don't have any special programs," White said.

She said the black community is hardest hit, with a birth rate 2.5 times higher than the white birth rate. In Jackson County, about 63 percent of all 2006 live births to teens occurred in the city. That year there were 294 babies born to teen mothers in this county.

That's why the initiative has drawn upon as many as people as possible, from the public schools to the clergy.

Linda Meeder, health and human services director at Jackson Public Schools, said every school district must create a sex education advisory board and ``parents and students must be part of it. We need the right people at the table."

The Rev. Wayne White, pastor of Word of Light Christian Center, 800 S. Cooper St., challenged the handful of clergy in the audience to become proactive.

``We've been quiet for too long. We have to recognize the depth of the problem, especially in the African-American community. We have a great responsibility and can't just sit back any more," he said.

Bruce Davis, community president at National City Bank of Jackson, described the program as a ``great initiative dealing with dire statistics in Jackson County."

``People here today have a real passion for this issue because they are giving their prime time hours. I'm impressed with the turnout," he said about the audience size, but not the demographics.

``There are too few minorities here and this is largely a minority issue. The ones who need to be here aren't," said Davis, who is black.

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Michigan Report

March 13, 2008

## **PANEL REVIEWS TRUSTS FOR RETIREE HEALTH CARE**

The retirement benefit systems for state employees, public school employees, judges, lawmakers and state troopers would be placed into separate trusts where the state would have the option of prefunding health care benefits or including health reimbursement accounts under draft legislation being considered by the House Retiree Health Care Reforms Committee.

Committee Chair [Rep. Mark Meadows](#) (D-East Lansing) said Thursday that he expects to have a formal bill creating the trusts to be introduced next week and that possible committee action could also occur at that time.

Alan Wilk, an attorney for Dykema, ran through a presentation on the draft legislation during the committee's meeting, saying it will house the current "pay-as-you-go" system the state currently uses to pay the health care benefits of retired workers, but it could also act as a repository for prefunding those liabilities.

Because of new accounting rules that require units of government to calculate their future health care liabilities for retired employees, it's estimated that Michigan faces a more than \$20 million unfunded problem down the road.

While the legislation does not require them to be included, it is permissive in establishing the ability to use individual reimbursement accounts so that current employees can fund their post retirement benefits. Mr. Wilk said the accounts could be used to supplement co-pays or other costs, be used to cover the costs of services not included in a retiree's benefit plan or to replace the current system of benefits provided by the retirement systems. Mr. Meadows said before anyone panicked about the individual accounts, the committee will be discussing that issue more in the future and the draft legislation is constructed to work without including health reimbursement accounts. Participation in the accounts for employees also could be set up to be voluntary or mandatory, Mr. Wilk added.

Under the proposed bill, the current retirement board members would act as trustees to the trust, with the state treasurer responsible for investing the assets in the trust.

[Rep. Chuck Moss](#) (R-Birmingham) asked several technical questions about the draft, but expressed some concern over its vesting schedule, which would have an individual fully vested within four years of employment. Mr. Moss said when Oakland County went to a prefunded health care system he still wasn't vested after six years as a commissioner. But Mr. Meadows said the vesting schedule was set up in the draft because that is what exists under the current system for employees.

[Rep. Brian Calley](#) (R-Portland) said that since the trust would give employees more assurance that they will receive health care benefits upon retirement, that perhaps that significance could come in handy when lawmakers are negotiating policy aspects of the proposal. However, Mr. Meadows cautioned that while the legislation creates a right to access the assets in the trust for the specific purpose of paying for health care benefits, the assets are still limited in that lawmakers have to put money in the trust. If the state continues to do pay-as-you-go, or adds the individual accounts, that will change the revenue picture, he said.

OAKLAND COUNTY

# Trial of ex-teacher adjourned

## Death of a juror's dad postpones case

BY L.L. BRASIER • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • March 14, 2008

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The second trial of James Perry, a former Oak Park school teacher accused of sexually assaulting two boys at Key Elementary School two years ago, was abruptly adjourned Thursday after one of the jurors reported that his father had died.

## ADVERTISEMENT

The juror reportedly wants to continue to serve and plans to return Monday, which is when the trial is expected to resume. Judge Denise Langford Morris, who is presiding over the trial, said both the defense and prosecution agreed to the postponement.

The delay comes in the first week of the retrial, and in the middle of the prosecutor's case.

Prosecutors contend Perry, 34, snatched a 4-year-old and a 5-year-old out of a supervised line in a hallway outside their classroom in October 2005, took them into an empty special education room and assaulted them.

Perry says he never met the children and did not know who they were until the allegations emerged. Several defense witnesses are expected to testify that the room was always occupied and that the assaults could not have happened there, defense attorneys said.

Perry initially was convicted of the assaults in September 2006.

But Judge Langford Morris tossed the conviction after learning that police had not interviewed three adults assigned to the special education room -- all who claim the room was occupied with children eating during the lunch hour, when the assaults allegedly happened.

However, Brenda Snow, the school's principal, testified earlier this week that she had ordered that the special education students eat in a separate room.

Contact **L.L. BRASIER** at 248-858-2262 or [brasier@freepress.com](mailto:brasier@freepress.com).

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# **Foster Care Kids Benefit**

On March 19, 2008, you will have a chance to ensure that children in foster care are given a voice within the courts.

The newspapers have been filled with stories of children falling through the cracks in a system that is overtaxed and undersupported. On March 19, you will be able to help ensure that each child is given a warm, caring voice looking out for their interests as the courts determine where they will live.

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Ingham County is hosting Have a Heart for CASA Kids at Connxtions Comedy Club, 200 N. East Lansing, MI on March 19 at 6:30 p.m. This evening of laughs and refreshments will warm your heart and help CASA to train volunteers to advocate on behalf of children stuck in foster care. With these volunteer voices the children are more likely to find safe, secure, permanent homes in less time through the courts.

Tickets for the event are \$25 each or \$40 per couple. They must be purchased or reserved in advance by calling 517.230.8822.

If you are unable to attend but would like to show your support and concern for children searching for safe and secure homes, donations can be sent to CASA of Ingham County, 303 W Kalamazoo, Lansing, MI, 48933. For more information or to purchase tickets call (517)230-8822.



## THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

### Brighton teen charged in CSC incident

Alleged molestation occurred at day care; prosecutor seeks to charge him as adult

Friday, March 14, 2008

#### From News staff reports

A 16-year-old Brighton boy could be tried as an adult on charges of molesting two girls, ages 4 and 8, at a day care operated by his mother, authorities say.

The teen was arrested last month and charged with two counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct and is lodged at a juvenile detention center, said Brighton Police Chief Tom Wightman.

The incident was reported Feb. 26 and the teen was arrested, Wightman said.

He is suspected of molesting the two girls at a day care his mother operated at her home in the 900 block of Fairway Trails in Brighton, the police chief said.

The day care is no longer in operation, he said. Police continue investigating the possibility of other victims at the day care. Livingston County Prosecutor David Morse is seeking to charge the teen as an adult. Morse could not be reached for a comment.

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# Teen accused in beating may work out plea deal

Friday, March 14, 2008

By Danielle Quisenberry  
Jackson Citizen Patriot

A 15-year-old boy accused of assaulting nearly to death one of his Leslie High School peers may plead guilty to a lesser charge. Jarod Marshall of Leslie on Thursday waived his right to a preliminary examination because he and his lawyer, Joseph Brehler, are considering a plea deal, Brehler said as the two stood before Ingham County District Judge Thomas Boyd. Ingham County Assistant Prosecutor Ayanna Jones told Boyd the prosecutor's office planned to dismiss the charge of assault with intent to murder if he pleads guilty to assault with intent to maim.

Advertisement



The lesser felony is punishable by up to 10 years in prison.

Assault with intent to murder is a potential life offense.

"We are in the process of discussing with the prosecution a resolution," Brehler told the judge.

Marshall's next court date, an arraignment in Circuit Court, is scheduled for March 26, but Marshall, a juvenile being tried as an adult, already waived the hearing.

He is accused of assaulting Mary Pulliam, 14, early Jan. 8 near the high school athletic field as she walked to school.

She spent many days in Sparrow Hospital recovering from the beating, which left her with a brain injury, bone fractures, facial injuries and liver and lung bruising.

Her mother, Debra Pulliam, said Thursday her daughter is yet to return to school full-time, but she is doing better. Pulliam said Mary hopes to return to attending all her classes by September.

"She's not done healing yet. She still has a long way to go, but she's getting better all the time," Debra Pulliam said after the court proceeding.

"She is young and she is strong and healthy. She should be 95 percent within a year."

Mary Pulliam was not in the courtroom Thursday.

"My daughter is terrified. She doesn't ever want to see him," Pulliam said of Marshall, who remained Thursday in the Ingham County Jail on a \$200,000 bond.

She was hesitant to speak on the specific legal proceedings, but said she will be pleased with the outcome as long as Marshall is kept from hurting others.

"That is the biggest thing, at least trying to protect the community," she said.



Michigan Report

March 13, 2008

## **ELDER ABUSE BILLS START MOVING**

Part of a package of bills providing more protections under the law for vulnerable adults sailed through the House on Thursday.

Approved by unanimous votes were [HB 5669](#) and [HB 5727](#).

The legislation requires a magistrate to take up a complaint of abuse filed by a third-party on behalf of a vulnerable adult and stipulates that individuals convicted of abuse and neglect could not inherit their victim's estate.

HB 5727 does include a provision for reconciliation, if the victim signs a written document attesting to the fact he or she has made up with the abuser and still wants them to inherit the estate.

The magistrate provisions are the same for domestic violence victims and do not alter the investigation process or the possibility a person could be charged with submitting a false report.

## **Flint Township man accused of preying on elderly Flint woman**

by Bryn Mickle | The Flint Journal

Friday March 14, 2008, 10:37 AM

Flint, Michigan -- A Flint Township handyman is suspected of stealing \$23,000 from an elderly stroke victim whom he allegedly befriended. After the 81-year-old Flint woman gave the man power of attorney, he sold her house, took money from her checking account and cashed one of her certificates of deposit, said Genesee County Prosecutor David S. Leyton. Genesee County Sheriff Robert J. Pickell called the allegations the work of a "bottom feeder."

"She signed everything over to him," Pickell said.

Brian S. Vanwormer, 46, was expected to turn himself in for arraignment this morning on felony charges of embezzlement of \$20,000 or more and embezzlement from a vulnerable adult. Each charge carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison.

Pickell and Leyton announced the charges at a press conference this morning.

The case may have never come to light without the work of a task force that focuses on elder abuse, said Pickell and Leyton.

A social worker with Genesys Regional Medical Center -- a partner in the task force -- was at a support group when the elderly woman living in foster care said that she had been swindled.

The allegations were handed over to a sheriff's department investigator who determined that Vanwormer had methodically taken money from the woman over a 10-month period, officials said.

Police believe some of the money was used to buy a 3.5-acre parcel of land in Osceola County.

"Anybody who would exploit an elderly person ought to have a very difficult time looking at themselves in the mirror," said Leyton.

Pickell said the investigation shows the importance of the Elder Abuse and Exploitation Prevention Team.

Formed last year and funded by the countywide seniors millage , the team includes the sheriff's department, the prosecutor's office, Genesee County Probate Court and the Center for Gerontology.

Two social workers from Genesys review guardian cases and report suspected abuse to the sheriff's department, said Pickell.

Before the task force was formed, Pickell said, these types of cases were "falling through the cracks."

"This is geared to protect our elders and vulnerable adults," said Pickell.



## KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

### Donation to agencies may prevent a future tragedy

Friday, March 14, 2008

Indiana Michigan Power, the company that left two Vicksburg women in the dark and the cold in December -- resulting in the death of one of them -- has made an appropriate gesture in offering a settlement.

The utility, which concedes that it did not properly contact Phyllis Willett before it turned off her power, is proposing it donate \$127,250 to South County Community Services and the local Area Agency on Aging.

A spokeswoman for the Michigan Public Service Commission called the proposal -- giving the money to organizations that care for the needy and elderly, including paying utility bills -- innovative and unique.

And, by voluntarily offering to donate the money in lieu of paying a \$11,100 fine, the company has made a savvy public relations move as well.

The Michigan Department of Human Services has seen the number of requests for home heating assistance this winter jump by 42 percent over last winter. That's 24,000 more requests than last year. Private charities such as the Salvation Army also are seeing requests for winter heating assistance go up.

A long, cold Michigan winter, combined with a long, cold Michigan economy, has increased the number of people seeking all kinds of assistance.

So the \$127,250 that Indiana Michigan Power proposes to give to two local social service agencies is certainly needed.

And that would help the many people who are seeking assistance.

But it's unlikely that assistance like this would have helped Phyllis Willett. The 90-year-old woman, who cared for her disabled daughter, was fiercely independent. Although she had come to the attention of social service agencies and had been offered help many times, she had repeatedly declined it, as was her right.

It is hard to know whether she would be alive today if the utility had followed proper procedures before shutting off her electricity. Hers was not a typical case of non-payment.

Indiana Michigan Power's response to this tragedy won't make any difference for Phyllis Willett or her family. But, in assisting the area's poor and elderly, it may help avert another tragedy another day.

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Michigan Department of Human Services News Release

Contact: Maureen Sorbet or Colleen Steinman (517) 373-7394

## **Dads get free legal advice and information about parenting**

March 14, 2008

GRAND RAPIDS – Information and legal advice about paternity, child custody, child support and parenting time will be available at the Dad's Legal Clinic on Wed., March 19 at the United Methodist Community House.

The event, held from 5:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. at 904 Sheldon SE, is one of three statewide meetings to help fathers learn more about their rights and responsibilities as parents. Free pizza and beverages will be served. Free child care also is available.

Organizers say that involved dads improve outcomes for children. One session was held in February in Lansing and another session will be held in Southfield in April. The series is sponsored by the Michigan Department of Human Services' Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Initiative, Michigan State University's Chance at Childhood, and community providers of the Proud Fathers-Proud Parents programs.

"Fathers play a critical role in the lives of their children," said Duane Michael Wilson, coordinator of the DHS Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Initiative. "This information can make the difference to a dad who wants to be involved in his child's life but doesn't know how."

For more information about the Grand Rapids Dad's Legal Clinic, please contact Kimberly Steed at (517) 432-8406 or the United Methodist Community House at (616) 452-3226.

For more information about DHS, go to [www.michigan.gov/dhs](http://www.michigan.gov/dhs)